PATTERNS OF POWER
A WORKING PAPER

The Sole Author

Why the strongest does not simply rule, what Hannibal could not do with an army, and the single condition under which a settlement among armed men holds

HELD AS TESTED, NOT REVEALED

THE SOLE AUTHOR
SECTION ONE

The question the two papers leave standing

The two essays this one sits between each stop one step short of the same place, and the gap between them is where the actual dynamics live.

Above Warlordism establishes that holding the governed down is a solved problem and that the unsolved problem sits one level up, inside the ruling group: a centre needs capable men to exist at all, and the capability that makes a man useful is what would let him replace the centre. It offers a menu of five imperfect answers — export the surplus, recruit outsiders who cannot inherit, rotate men chosen by merit, divide power on purpose, co-opt by marriage or faith. What it does not say is *why any of these bind*. A menu of techniques is not a mechanism. Each of the five describes something a centre does; none explains why an ambitious man, faced with it, declines the grab.

The Manufactured Ground supplies the missing half in structural terms: the armed men want ownership rather than possession, ownership is a made thing needing an author, and no competitor can be that author without collapsing the whole arrangement back into a contest of strength. This is right, and it names the equilibrium property of a working settlement. But it describes the settlement from outside, as a completed thing, in the voice of someone who has already seen which arrangements lasted. It does not descend to the level of the individual armed man on the morning he is deciding whether to move.

And that man is the whole question. He does not care what property the settlement must have to be stable across three centuries. He is asking something narrower and more urgent: *if I take my neighbour's holding this spring, what happens to me?* Everything the framework claims stands or falls on whether there is a real, first-person, prudential answer to that question — one that does not require him to be pious, or public-spirited, or fooled.

There is. It is not the answer either paper gives. And once it is stated, several things that look like anomalies stop being anomalies, including the one this paper takes as its worked case: that the greatest field commander of the ancient world held an undefeated army for fifteen years and never controlled the city that sent him, and that when he finally did take control of it, he took it by standing for election.

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THE SOLE AUTHOR
SECTION TWO

Why the strongest does not simply rule

Take the question in its bluntest form. If a distribution of holdings among armed men needs an author, why is the author not simply the strongest of them? He has the swords. Let him say who holds what, and let anyone who disagrees come and try him.

Three things are true here, and they operate at different depths.

The first is that there is usually no strongest man, and this is not a coincidence but a selection effect. The conditions that produce a durable settlement are precisely the conditions of rough parity: several armed powers, none able to defeat a coalition of the others, all of them capable of hurting each other badly. Where one party *is* decisively strongest, you do not get a settlement — you get an autocracy, and autocracies of that kind are notoriously short. They last exactly as long as the man, because nothing in them is designed to survive him. So the historical record does not show us armed men choosing a settlement over dominance. It shows us the arrangements that formed where dominance was unavailable. The strongest man does not settle; the strongest man conquers, and then his sons lose it. We study the settlements because they left archives, and *Above Warlordism* is right that the archive tilts toward survivors. Part of the answer to "why not just the strongest?" is that where the strongest ruled, there was no order to study.

The second is that even the strongest man is strongest only briefly, and he knows it. He ages. He is unhorsed. His son is fourteen. This is the point at which the exogenous anchor stops looking like a constraint imposed on the powerful and starts looking like something the powerful *buy*. A man whose title rests on his own arm holds nothing that survives his arm; his estate is a life tenancy that his heir must win again from scratch, against men who watched him win it and know how it was done. A man whose title rests on an authority outside the whole contest holds something transmissible. The price of transmissibility is submission: he must accept

that the same authority which secures his son's inheritance also limits what he himself may do this spring. That is a real cost and it is paid in the coin he most values — present arbitrariness — for a return he will not live to collect.

This inverts the usual reading of sacral constraint. Ardashir's testament, the Mandate's leash, the caliph's subordination to a law he cannot make, the annual term of a suffete: these are not chains the priests fastened on reluctant kings. They are, in the main, the price kings paid to buy their houses a future. The clergy did not impose the anchor on the crown; the crown and the clergy jointly built a thing that neither owned, because a thing either of them owned would have been worth nothing.

The third reason is the mechanism proper, and it is not about the strongest man at all. It is about everyone else.

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THE SOLE AUTHOR
SECTION THREE

The work is done on the bystanders

Return to the man deciding whether to take his neighbour's holding. Set aside his conscience entirely; assume he has none. What determines his answer is a prediction about third parties.

There are, say, twelve armed houses in the region. He proposes to attack the eleventh. What matters is what the other ten do. If they wait and watch, the fight is one against one and he likes his chances. If a few join him for a share of the spoil, better still. If all ten fall on him, he is destroyed. His decision is entirely a forecast of the bystanders.

Now consider the bystanders' problem, because it is the harder one and it is where everything turns. Each of the ten is asking: *is this my quarrel?* Without a common ground of title, the honest answer is no. My neighbour's holding is his affair; spending my men on his defence buys me nothing but casualties and an enemy. Worse, I must worry that if I intervene and the others do not, I have made myself the next target while they husband their strength. The rational bystander, in a world of separately-held possessions, waits. And because every bystander reasons this way and knows the others do too, waiting is not merely each man's best move but the confidently predictable move — which is exactly what makes the aggressor's grab safe, and why a world of purely private holdings is a world of continuous predation. Warlordism is not a failure of restraint. It is a coordination failure among the men who might have restrained it.

A shared source of title dissolves this, and it does so mechanically. If every house's holding derives its rightfulness from the same authority, then an attack on any holding is an attack on the ground beneath all of them. The bystander's calculation changes not because he has become moral but because the arithmetic has changed: letting this attack stand establishes that holdings may be taken, which is a fact about *his* holding as much as his neighbour's. Intervention is now self-defence at one remove. And critically, he can predict that the other nine are running the same

calculation, which means he is not exposing himself by acting — he is joining a coalition that will form whether or not he leads it.

So the anchor's real work is not performed on the aggressor's soul. **It is performed on the bystanders' expectations, and it reaches the aggressor only as a forecast he cannot beat.** He abstains not because he believes but because he can count.

The consequence: the two jobs of belief require different things

This yields a correction to *The Manufactured Ground* that I think is substantial rather than cosmetic.

That paper insists — rightly, and against the cynical reading — that a legitimating belief works only where it is genuinely held, that a story merely deployed by rulers who see through it is "force in a costume" and does no legitimating work. This is correct for the first of belief's two jobs, the cheap compliance of the many. The peasant who privately regards the arrangement as robbery is not rendering the tithe for free; he is rendering it because a soldier is nearby, which is the expensive arrangement the belief exists to avoid. Mass compliance really does require conviction.

But the second job, the binding of the armed, requires something weaker and quite different. It requires only **common knowledge that the others will act on it.**

A baron who privately regards the coronation as theatre still cannot profit from attacking his neighbour, provided he expects the other barons to treat the attack as an assault on their own titles. His private scepticism is irrelevant to his behaviour, because his behaviour is governed by his forecast of them, not by his estimate of the doctrine's truth. And they, in turn, may be equally sceptical, and it changes nothing, so long as each expects the rest to act. What the elite-binding function needs is not that the anchor be believed but that it be **commonly expected to be acted upon** — a much cheaper and much more robust condition, since it survives any amount of private cynicism as long as no one can be sure the others share it.

This resolves something the sincerity-requirement version of the theory handles badly: the routine historical coexistence of a devout population with a worldly, calculating, frequently blasphemous elite. Renaissance Italy is full of prelates nobody could call believers, presiding over an order the anchor still held together. That is not a puzzle. The two audiences were never running the same program. The peasant

needed the story to be true. The baron needed only for the other barons to behave as if it were.

It also explains why the anchor is so much easier to destroy from the top than from the bottom. Mass conviction is expensive to install and expensive to undo — *Above Warlordism* is right that formation does durable work. But common expectation among a small elite is fragile in a specific way: it can collapse in a season, without anyone changing their mind about anything, the moment enough of them come to believe that enough of the others will no longer act on it. Elite settlements do not usually die of disillusionment. They die of a sudden, mutual, entirely correct recalculation about what everybody else is about to do.

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SECTION FOUR

Four properties, and why the content is nearly free

If the anchor's job is to make bystander punishment predictable, then we can say exactly what it must supply, and the list is short. It must be:

1. **Determinate.** It must yield exactly one answer to "who rightfully holds this," and one answer to "who is next." A ground that yields two answers is not a ground; it is a casus belli with citations. 2. **Unrevisable by any competitor.** If any party to the contest can edit it, it confers no protection, because the strong man need not break the rule — he can amend it. 3. **Common knowledge.** Every party must know the rule, know the others know it, and know the others know he knows. This is why the ritual apparatus is not decoration. A coronation performed before the assembled magnates is a machine for manufacturing common knowledge, and its function is nearly independent of its content. 4. **Attached to the office rather than the man.** Otherwise the ground dies with its holder, and the whole arrangement must be rebuilt in the worst possible conditions, at a funeral, among armed heirs.

Divinity supplies all four elegantly, which is why it has been the commonest carrier. But nothing in the list requires a god, and this is the point at which the volume's own China essay has already arrived from another direction: an impersonal Heaven supplies exogeneity, a dead sage's closed canon supplies unrevisability, and the cosmology supplies the framing, and together they did everything a god does without being one. What the Chinese case isolates negatively, this analysis states positively. The variable was never the supernatural. It was determinacy, unrevisability, common knowledge, and attachment to an office.

Arbitrariness is a feature

Here is where a genuinely strange fact about succession rules stops being strange.

Set the world's succession rules side by side and there is no convergence whatever on *content*: primogeniture, ultimogeniture, agnatic seniority, tanistry, election by

magnates, election by clergy, designation by the predecessor, acclamation by the army, drawing of lots, divine designation of a bloodline, examination. These produce wildly different qualities of ruler and nobody ever settled on a best one. What they converge on, without exception among the arrangements that lasted, is the four properties above.

Which means the content is nearly free — and that the apparent absurdity of many of these rules is not a defect but part of the mechanism. A rule that turns on birth order is transparently indifferent to merit; that is precisely why no competitor can argue himself into it. A rule that turns on the drawing of lots cannot be captured by the cleverest man in the room. The more arbitrary the rule, the less plausible it is that anyone designed it to favour himself, and therefore the more available it is as common ground. **A rule chosen for its unhackability will look, from outside, like a rule chosen at random, and the resemblance is not accidental.**

Venice took this to its logical terminus. The Doge, from 1268, was chosen by a procedure of ten alternating rounds of lot and ballot — thirty men drawn by lot from the Great Council, cut by lot to nine, those nine electing forty, cut by lot to twelve, and so on through four more alternations before a final forty-one elected the Doge. No modern account of this process can quite keep a straight face. But its purpose is entirely legible under the four properties: it is determinate, it yields exactly one man, it is performed publicly before the whole patriciate, and it is engineered so that no faction can predict, and therefore cannot buy, the body that will decide. The Venetians did not build that machine because they were baroque. They built it because their anchor had no god in it, and an anchor without a god must get its unrevisability from procedure, and procedure gets it from arbitrariness deliberately introduced. The republic ran for five centuries without a successful coup.

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THE SOLE AUTHOR
SECTION FIVE

Why the anchor must sit outside: the revision problem

The unrevisability requirement is the one that forces exogeneity, and the argument for it is worth stating exactly, because it is the pivot of the whole framework and *The Manufactured Ground* asserts it more than it demonstrates it.

The naive threat to a settlement is that a strong man *breaks* the rule. This is the manageable case. Rule-breaking is legible, it is what the bystander coalition is trained to punish, and the punishment is predictable enough to deter.

The real threat is that a strong man *changes* the rule. And rule-change is far more dangerous, because it does not trigger the coalition. The bystanders' whole mechanism is keyed to violations of the ground; it has nothing to say about someone who alters the ground lawfully. If the source of title lies inside the competition — if it is one competitor's word, or a body he can pack, or a doctrine he can define — then the strongest man never needs to violate anything. He revises, and every subsequent seizure is regular, and the bystanders, whose coalition forms only against irregularity, stand and watch.

This is exactly what al-Ma'mun attempted at the Mihna and exactly why the ulama fought him over what looks, from outside, like a metaphysical quibble. The createdness of the Qur'an was never really the point; the point was who gets to say. A created Qur'an is a thing made in time, and therefore a thing about which authority can be exercised; an uncreated Qur'an is not editable by anybody, which is the entire property that made it worth fifteen years of flogging. The scholars were not defending a doctrine. They were defending the unrevisability of the ground on which every holding in the empire stood, against the one man positioned to revise it.

And it is why Diocletian failed where Constantine did not, in terms sharper than the volume's own account. Diocletian's manufactured sacrality failed not because it was insincere — it may well have been sincere — but because it was *revisable by its*

author. An emperor who is Jovius by his own proclamation can be Jovius on different terms tomorrow, and every magnate could see it. Constantine's God could not be revised by Constantine. That is the whole difference, and it is a structural property, not a spiritual one.

So exogeneity is not the requirement. **Unrevisability is the requirement, and exogeneity is its most reliable means** — because the surest way to make a thing unrevisable by every competitor is to place it where no competitor can reach it. Death does this. Antiquity does this. Divinity does this. Elaborate randomised procedure does this. A foreign city does this, which is worth remembering when we come to Carthage's tithe to Tyre.

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THE SOLE AUTHOR
SECTION SIX

The single condition: one author of title

ow the proposition this paper exists to state.

The bystander mechanism works only if the ground really is common — if every armed man's holding derives from the same source. The instant a *second* source of title appears, one that some men's holdings flow from, the mechanism does not merely weaken. It inverts.

Consider a magnate whose lands come not from the anchor but from a patron who granted them. His interest in the anchor's integrity is now conditional. If his patron moves against the settlement, the magnate's rational course is to follow, because his title travels with his patron rather than with the ground. He is not defecting from the coalition; he was never fully in it. And every man in his position calculates the same way, which means the patron does not face the bystander coalition at all — he brings a portion of it with him.

This is the condition, stated as plainly as I can manage:

> **A settlement of armed men holds only where the anchor is the sole author of their titles. Where a competing patron can grant title — land, office, immunity, a share that endures — the order has two authors, and an order with two authors is a contest between them wearing the costume of a settlement.**

The diagnostic this generates is unusually sharp, because "who can grant heritable title to armed men" is a question with a checkable answer in most well-documented orders. Run it across the cases.

Rome before Marius. Legionaries were propertied citizens levied for a campaign and returned to their farms. Their holdings came from the civic order — citizenship, ager publicus, family land — and no commander could add to them. A consul who marched on Rome would have been asking men to attack the source of their own titles. For four centuries, with a nakedly aristocratic and murderously competitive elite, nobody tried it.

Rome after Marius. Once the propertyless were enrolled and the discharge settlement became land, the general acquired the power to make his soldiers *owners*. He was now a source of title. And the veteran's title depended on his commander's ability to force the settlement through a hostile Senate, which made the soldier's interest run to the man rather than the institution. Sulla marched on Rome in 88 BCE, and every serious threat to the Republic thereafter came from the same mechanism. The Republic did not fall because its elite grew corrupt; its elite had always been corrupt. It fell because a second author of title appeared, and then several. Augustus's settlement is best read as the reconstruction of sole authorship — the *aerarium militare*, the state pension, the oath sworn to the princeps — moving the soldier's future back inside a single source. It held for two centuries and collapsed in the third when the armies rediscovered that they could make emperors, which is to say when the source of title became, once again, plural.

Carthage. The armed men were foreigners on wages. They could not hold Punic land, could not enter the Punic elite, could not transmit anything. They were structurally excluded from the settlement — and therefore, decisively, no Carthaginian commander could make them owners. This is the single most important structural fact about Carthage and it has been hiding in plain sight inside an old observation about mercenary dependence. The mercenary system is usually read as a strategic weakness, and it was one. It was also the thing that kept the oligarchy alive for six centuries: a commander who cannot grant title cannot build a faction, only rent one. The corresponding cost fell due in 241, when the wages failed and the men outside the settlement demonstrated what men outside a settlement do. The Truceless War was so peculiarly savage — envoys mutilated, no quarter asked or given — because there was no shared ground within which surrender could mean anything. Both facts, the stability and the atrocity, come from the same design.

The Ottoman *kul* system. Slaves of the sultan, taken as boys, converted, forbidden to found lineages, their property reverting to the crown at death. This is sole authorship as deliberate engineering: an entire governing and military class constructed so that no member can author anything, and every title traces to one source. The system's decay follows the prediction with almost embarrassing precision. As janissary positions became hereditary and janissary wealth became transmissible through the seventeenth century, the corps became a second author of title, and it began doing what second authors do — deposing sultans.

Imperial China. Office from examination, not inheritance; the rule of avoidance barring officials from serving in their home districts; regular rotation. Every clause of that arrangement attacks the same target. No official may accumulate a local base from which he could grant anything to anyone, and the canon that qualifies him is closed and belongs to a dead man. Sole authorship, maintained by a machine that manufactures its own interpreter class afresh each generation.

Medieval Europe — the awkward case, and the informative one. Subinfeudation means title flows *through* intermediate lords: the knight holds of the baron, the baron of the count, the count of the king. This is a multi-author system by construction, and the framework predicts exactly what medieval Europe actually delivers — chronically weak monarchy, endemic baronial war, and centuries of institutional effort to patch the problem. Liege homage, which declares one lord paramount over all a man's other obligations, is a direct attempt to restore sole authorship. So is the *rex Dei gratia* formula, so are the royal courts pulling jurisdiction upward, so is the eventual assertion that all land is ultimately held of the crown. Europe is not a counterexample. It is the framework's most detailed illustration of what happens where the condition fails, and of how expensive and how long it takes to repair.

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THE SOLE AUTHOR
SECTION SEVEN

Hannibal, or what an army cannot buy

Now the question that prompted this paper, and I think it now has a complete answer.

Hannibal Barca commanded for fifteen years in Italy. He destroyed consular armies at the Trebia, at Trasimene, and at Cannae, where he killed something on the order of fifty thousand Romans in an afternoon and remains the standing exhibit in every staff college in the world. His army was personally devoted to him — polyglot, unpaid for long stretches, never mutinous, which is a more remarkable fact than the victories. His family held Iberia as a private dominion with its own silver mines. If military force converted into political control, no man in the ancient world was better placed.

He never controlled Carthage by force. Nothing in the record suggests he tried.

Because his army was not convertible. This is the first and deepest reason, and it is the Marian comparison exactly inverted. A Roman general of the late Republic could promise his men land — permanent, heritable, real title — and so could convert wages into ownership and an army into a personal following that outlasted the campaign. Hannibal could promise money and plunder. Money is possession: present-tense, spent, gone. It buys a man's service this season and buys nothing about next. And the specific consequence is decisive: an army marching on Carthage would have been marching on its own paymaster, to seize a treasury it was attacking, in a city where not one of its soldiers could hold a field. There was no future in that direction for them, and Hannibal's men followed him because he delivered, not because they were his clients. The possession-ownership distinction, which *The Manufactured Ground* develops for land, turns out to govern armies too — and it decides which commanders can become tyrants and which cannot.

Because Carthage held the other two legs. *Above Warlordism*'s tripod is the right instrument here. Hannibal held organised violence. The council of elders held

the wealth; the great families held the interpretive seam, including a Court of One Hundred and Four that existed specifically to try generals and was, by report, entirely willing to crucify them. Carthage had also split the general's office from the civil magistracy — a deliberate instance of *Above Warlordism*'s "divide power on purpose" family, and evidently an effective one. Hannibal in Italy had one leg of a tripod, at distance, on credit.

Because he took the city, when he took it, through the constitution. This is the fact that settles the matter, and it is not obscure — it is simply never told alongside Cannae. In 196 BCE, some five years after the defeat at Zama, Hannibal stood for and won election as suffete. He then did what no army of his could have done: he attacked the oligarchy's institutional base directly, breaking the life tenure of the Hundred and Four in favour of annual election, and overhauling the state's revenues so thoroughly that Carthage could meet the Roman indemnity without new taxes — which exposed, publicly, how much had been going into private hands. He was, in office, a far more serious threat to the ruling families than he had ever been at the head of an army. The route to control of Carthage ran through the anchor, not around it. Cannae did not convert. An election did.

Because when the anchor could not settle the contest, the oligarchy went outside it for a floor. And this is the part that matters most for the theory. The families Hannibal had cornered could not defeat him within the Punic order. So they wrote to Rome, accusing him of conspiring with Antiochus III. A Roman commission arrived in 195. Hannibal did not wait for it; he fled by night, and died in exile years later, hunted.

Read that carefully. The Carthaginian settlement, faced with the one internal challenge that genuinely tested it, did not resolve the challenge. It imported an external power to remove the challenger. This is precisely what I flagged earlier as the reason Carthage cannot serve as a clean vindication of the god-free anchor: the order was never delegitimated because it was never really tested, and the closest it came to a test, it outsourced. That is not a mark against Carthage. It is a mark against using Carthage as proof of anything about anchors under stress.

And the Barcid state in Iberia is the control condition. From 237, Hamilcar and then Hasdrubal and then Hannibal built in southern Iberia something the ancient sources describe in near-monarchical terms: a personal army, independent silver revenue, dynastic marriage into Iberian nobility, a capital of their own

foundation, and — on a contested but suggestive numismatic reading — coinage bearing a Melqart-Herakles with Barcid features. That is legitimacy manufactured by a competitor out of his own person and his own success, which the framework says cannot bind. It didn't. The Barcid dominion produced no institution, no succession rule, no claim that anyone else ever invoked; it evaporated with Roman conquest and left nothing behind but a strategic legacy. Force in a costume, and the costume did not outlast the force.

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THE SOLE AUTHOR
SECTION EIGHT

The price, and the tell

Above Warlordism offers a diagnostic that this analysis makes considerably more powerful: **force never pays for what it does not need.** An apex holding uncontested force that nonetheless pays a real, avoidable cost to acquire legitimacy has thereby revealed that the legitimacy was load-bearing for some audience whose belief mattered.

Reading that through the sole-authorship condition sharpens it into something you can actually use in the archive. Ask, of any order: **what did the strongest man in it give up, and to whom, and could he have refused?**

Timur — already the volume's own example — is the pure case. He commanded the cavalry absolutely. He married a Chinggisid princess anyway, took the title of royal son-in-law, and ruled through puppet Khans he installed and could have dispensed with in an afternoon. The expenditure is the proof: his soldiers' criterion of rightful supreme authority was a real load his force could not carry. And note the further point, which bears on Section V — the Chinggisid bloodline was an anchor located *within* the human world, a lineage of actual living men. It was nonetheless unrevisable by Timur, because he could not become a Chinggisid, and that is all unrevisability requires. He could conquer everything from Delhi to Ankara and could not amend one fact about his own descent. An anchor need not be metaphysically transcendent. It needs only to be beyond the reach of the particular men competing.

Run the same question elsewhere and it keeps paying. Constantine submitted to a God whose church he could not simply command, and it held. Diocletian claimed a divinity he conferred on himself, paid nothing for it, and it fell with him. Al-Ma'mun tried to acquire the anchor rather than pay for it, and lost. Charlemagne, who did not need the Pope's hands on his head to hold Francia, went to Rome for them anyway. Hannibal, having every military reason not to, stood for election.

The tell is always the same shape: **the powerful pay for what they cannot take.** And what they cannot take, by definition, is exactly what makes the settlement worth having.

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THE SOLE AUTHOR
SECTION NINE

How settlements fail

Four routes, and each falls out of the mechanism rather than being observed and listed afterward.

1. The anchor becomes revisable. A competitor acquires the power to edit the ground rather than merely to violate it, and the bystander coalition — keyed to violation — never assembles. Diocletian's self-conferred sanctity; al-Ma'mun's attempt at the Mihna; every case of a ruler capturing the interpreter class outright. The tell is not tyranny; it is the sudden absence of any argument the tyrant's rivals can make.

2. A second author of title appears. The condition of Section VI fails. Late-Republican Rome; the hereditary janissary; European subinfeudation; any patron who can make armed men owners. The tell is usually mistaken for something else at the time — it looks like generous provision for veterans, or like a well-earned privilege becoming customary.

3. The succession rule goes indeterminate. The anchor survives but stops yielding exactly one answer, and the determinacy requirement fails at the worst possible moment. The Tetrarchy; the Mongol *quriltai*; Ottoman succession before the seniority principle; the Sunni-Shia fork, which is a succession crisis over the anchor that never resolved and has therefore been running for fourteen centuries. The tell is that everyone can cite a rule and no two men cite the same one.

4. The floor is broken from outside. Conquest. And this is the route that must be excluded from the evidence rather than counted in it, because *it is not a test of the anchor at all*. Carthage in 146 tells us nothing about whether the Punic settlement could have survived its own internal contradictions, any more than a building demolished by artillery tells us about its foundations. Any comparative argument that treats longevity as a measure of anchor quality has to segregate the orders that failed from the orders that were killed, and most such arguments do not.

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THE SOLE AUTHOR
SECTION TEN

What would refute this

The user of this framework asked for the cases that break it, so here are the conditions under which I would abandon the central proposition, and the two candidates that come closest.

The proposition is falsified by a durable, internally-stable order in which armed elites' titles demonstrably flowed from multiple independent authors over generations, with no observable effort to consolidate authorship — or by an order whose ruler openly revised the anchor at will and which nonetheless remained stable across successions.

Candidate one: Henry VIII. A ruler who seized the interpreter class outright, made himself supreme head of the church, dissolved the monasteries, redistributed something like a sixth of the land of England to his own supporters, and left a stronger monarchy than he found. On its face this is Section V's nightmare: the anchor revised by a competitor, and the order not merely surviving but consolidating.

The available reply is that he did not make himself the author so much as swap authors — the ground shifted to scripture, to statute, and to the Crown-in-Parliament, and the last of these is a genuinely exogenous construction that no subsequent monarch could revise unilaterally, as Charles I discovered at some cost to his neck. It is also fair to note that the beneficiaries of the monastic redistribution acquired an enormous permanent stake in the new settlement's irreversibility, which is sole authorship being purchased in real time. But I want to record that this reply has a whiff of rescue about it. The Tudor succession crises, and the century of religious war that followed in England, are what the framework should predict from an anchor that had been visibly revised by a living man — and something like that did happen. The case strains the theory and should be written up at length rather than waved past.

Candidate two: the steppe. Chinggisid legitimacy is an anchor consisting of a bloodline of living men, inside the human world, in principle contestable by

genealogical claim — and it was among the most durable anchors on record, binding Muslim, Buddhist, and shamanist successor states across four centuries and half of Eurasia. It should be fragile by the analysis above, and it was not. My answer is Section VIII's: unrevisability is relative to the men competing, and no competitor could make himself a descendant of Genghis. But this is worth pressing, because it implies the anchor need not be exogenous in any deep sense at all — only unforgeable by the current claimants — which is a materially weaker and more interesting claim than the one *The Manufactured Ground* makes, and one the volume should probably adopt.

And a general caution about the whole method. The strongest objection to this framework is the one *Above Warlordism* names against itself: that it is unfalsifiable in the way that most flatters its holder, because every arrangement can be re-described in its terms after the fact. The defence has to be that it makes checkable predictions about *particular* things — that the powerful will pay observable costs for legitimacy they could not seize; that orders where commanders can grant heritable title to soldiers will produce personal armies within a generation or two; that succession rules will converge on determinacy while diverging freely on content. Those are claims that could come back wrong. Someone should go and try to make them come back wrong.

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THE SOLE AUTHOR
SECTION ELEVEN

The disciplines

our cautions.

The mechanism is stated too cleanly. Real orders do not have one author of title; they have a dominant author and a fringe of contested claims, and the interesting question is usually a matter of degree. I have written the condition as binary because a binary states the logic clearly. It should be applied as a spectrum, and the honest form of the diagnostic is not "does a second author exist" but "how much title flows through channels the anchor does not control, and is that share rising."

Hannibal's suffeteship rests on thin ancient evidence. Livy and Cornelius Nepos are the main sources, both Roman, both writing well after the fact, both with reasons to present Carthaginian oligarchs as venal and Hannibal as formidable to the end. The broad outline — the magistracy, the reform of the Hundred and Four, the financial overhaul, the denunciation to Rome, the flight in 195 — is generally accepted, but the detail is not secure and the framing is not neutral. Anyone building on it should say so.

The bystander mechanism does not require that anyone reason this way consciously, and it would be a distortion to imply that barons sat down and computed coalition probabilities. The mechanism is selective, not deliberative: arrangements in which bystanders happened to punish aggressors survived, and men formed inside surviving arrangements experienced the resulting reflex as honour, or duty, or the obvious response to an outrage. The calculation is in the structure, not usually in the head. This is the same point *Above Warlordism* makes about the filter, and it applies here.

And legibility is not pardon. The sole-authorship condition is satisfied most perfectly by the arrangements that were most total: the *kul* system was human beings taken as children from their families; Carthage's stability rested on an armed class permanently excluded from ownership, and the price of that exclusion was paid in 241 by everyone the Truceless War touched. To explain why an arrangement was

structurally sound is to say nothing whatever about what it cost the people inside it, and the cases where the mechanism worked best are frequently the cases where it was worst to live under.

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THE SOLE AUTHOR
SOURCES

A note on sources

The framework. This paper stands between two companion essays and argues with both: *Above Warlordism* (the floor and the story; the seam; the unsolved elite problem; the filter; the expenditure diagnostic) and *The Manufactured Ground* (possession and ownership; the exogenous author; cosmization; succession). Its three claimed contributions are the bystander-coordination mechanism (§III), the distinction between conviction and common knowledge as the conditions of belief's two jobs (§III), and the sole-authorship condition (§VI).

Borrowed ideas. Bentham on property as expectation and Cohen on property as delegated sovereignty underlie §I, both by way of *The Manufactured Ground*. Schelling supplies both the credibility point and, more importantly here, the focal-point logic behind §IV's treatment of arbitrary rules. Rappaport's unfalsifiable postulates and Berger's cosmization are used as *The Manufactured Ground* uses them. North, Wallis, and Weingast supply the dominant-coalition framing that §III is attempting to complete.

Historical spine. The Carthaginian constitutional arrangements (suffetes, council of elders, the Court of 104, the separation of the general's office from the civil magistracy) rest on Aristotle *Politics* II.11, Polybius VI, and the modern treatments in Hoyos and Lancel. The Mercenary War follows Polybius I.65–88. Hannibal's suffeteship and flight follow Livy XXXIII.45–49 and Nepos, *Hannibal*, with the caution above. The Barcid position in Iberia follows Polybius and Diodorus, with the numismatic Melqart-Herakles identification noted as contested. Marius's enrolment of the *capite censi* and the subsequent politics of veteran settlement follow the standard treatments of the late Republic; the *aerarium militare* of 6 CE is in Dio and Suetonius. The Venetian ducal procedure of 1268 is standard. The Ottoman *kul* system and the hereditarisation of janissary position, the Chinese examination system and the rule of avoidance, and the European practice of subinfeudation and liege homage are all drawn from standard scholarship and used

structurally rather than as original research. Timur's *güregen* title and double legitimacy follow Manz, as in *Above Warlordism*.

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